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CIA critical of Warren Commission

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WASHINGTON — A CIA memo says that the Warren Commission should have given more attention to the possibility that President John F. Kennedy's assassination was the result of a foreign conspiracy, particularly in light of two promising leads which were not pursued.

"The Warren Commission report should have left a wider 'window' for this contingency," according to a CIA memo written in May 1975, at the request of the Rockefeller Commission.

The 27-page document stresses that solid evidence to overturn the Warren Commission's finding that Lee Harvey Oswald killed Kennedy on his own "did (and does) not exist in Washington. But such evidence could exist in Moscow and-or Havana."

The two most promising leads to such evidence are testimony about 1959 contacts between Oswald and Cuban officials, and a public threat by Fidel Castro against the lives of U. S. leaders, according to the memo.

The Oswald file

Entitled "Review of Selected Items in the Lee Harvey Oswald File Regarding Allegations of the Castro Cuban Involvement in the John F. Kennedy Assassination," the memo was among some 1,500 pages of documents on the Nov. 22, 1963, shooting which the CIA turned over to the Rockefeller Commission.

Those files have since been turned over to the Senate Intelligence Committee, where a panel headed by Sen. Richard S. Schweiker (R., Pa.) is investigating the Kennedy slaying.

The documents have now been declassified by the CIA in response to a Freedom of Information request filed by David W. Belin, who served as counsel to both the Rockefeller and Warren Commissions.

The name of the memo's author has been deleted, but Belin said in an interview that it was written by Raymond Rocca, a former member of the agency's counterintelligence staff.

Testimony cited

In the memo, Rocca cites the testimony before the Warren Commission of Nelson Delgado, Oswald's closest friend during training at California's El Toro Marine Corps Base in 1959. The Warren report noted that Oswald told Delgado that he was in touch with Cuban diplomatic officials.

But, according to Rocca, "Delgado's testimony says a lot more of possible operational significance than is reflected by the language of the report, and its implications do not appear to have been run down or developed by investigation."

In the memo, Rocca cites Delgado's testimony that Oswald told him "right after he had this conversation with the Cuban people ... that he was going to — once he got out of the service — he was going to Switzerland." Oswald applied to Albert Schweitzer College in Switzerland in March 1959, was discharged from the Marines in September, and entered the Soviet Union in October of that same year, Rocca notes.

Delgado's testimony is "of germinal significance to any review of the background of Lee Harvey Oswald's feeling toward and relations with Castro's Cuba." Rocca adds.

At the time he wrote the memo, Rocca, who had served as CIA liaison with the Warren Commission, was a consultant for the agency.

Castro's threat against the lives of U. S. leaders was made on Sept. 7, 1963, during an impromptu interview with AP correspondent Daniel Harker in Havana. "There can be no question ... that this event represented a more-than-ordinary attempt to get a message on the record in the United States," Rocca maintains in his memo to the Rockefeller Commission.

Newspaper article

Rocca notes that the story appeared in the Times-Picayune in New Orleans — "where Lee Harvey Oswald resided" — and quoted Castro as saying "U. S. leaders would be in danger if they helped in any attempt to do away with the leaders of Cuba."

If Oswald, who, according to the testimony of his wife Marina and others, was an avid newspaper reader, saw the story, "it must be considered of great significance in the light of the pathological evaluation of Oswald's passive-aggressive makeup ... irrespective of whether there was any formal mandate, or even security service contact, with Oswald by the Cubans or the Russians," Rocca says.

However, Rocca adds, "there is no evidence in the files of the Kennedy assassination that this Castro interview was considered in following up leads ... although (CIA) specifically directed (its) Headquarters attention to the AP story very shortly after the Dallas killing."

Defenders of the Warren report, including Belin and President Ford, who served on the commission, have pointed out that it did not rule out altogether the possibility of a foreign conspiracy but said instead that "the Commission has found no evidence that (Oswald) was part of any conspiracy, domestic or foreign, to assassinate President Kennedy."

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